



# Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 1997 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Neural tube defects such as spina bifida and anencephaly are serious birth defects that affect approximately 500 pregnancies each year in California. Hispanic women have the highest incidence of neural tube defects. Women can reduce their risk for bearing babies with these birth defects by consuming 400 µg of folate (folic acid) per day before and during pregnancy.

The 1997 California Women's Health Survey asked women questions related to a national March of Dimes telephone survey regarding their knowledge of folate. Women were asked if they had ever heard or read anything about folic acid or folate, whether they believe taking folate increases, reduces, or has no effect on the risk of birth defects, how a woman can increase her intake of folate, whether they took prenatal or multivitamins before their last pregnancy, and whether they were taking multivitamins or prenatal vitamins. Data were available from a 1997 national March of Dimes survey which asked women throughout the United States the same questions.

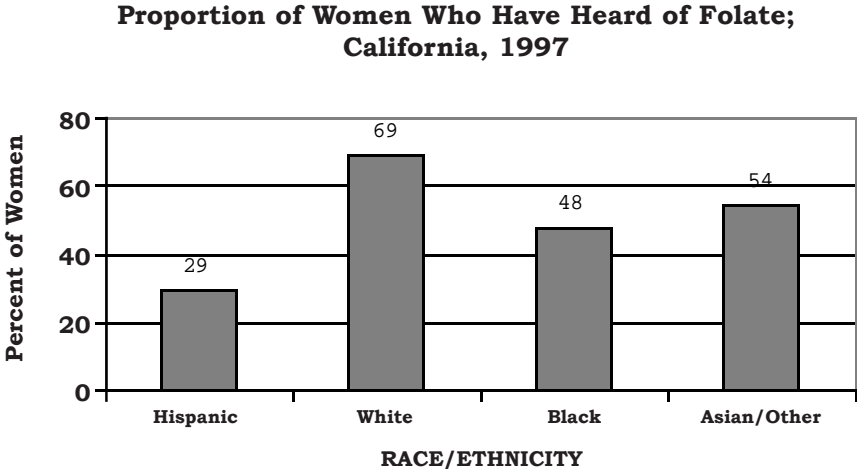
- Respondents to the California survey were less likely than respondents to the national survey to have heard of folate (58% vs. 66%). Among women with less than a high school education, 22% of California women had heard of folate compared to 37% of women respondents to the national survey.
- Only 29% of Hispanic women had heard of folate compared to 69% of White women, 48% of Black women, and 54% of Asian/Others.
- Among 18–29 year-olds, only 46% said that they had heard of folate.
- Among women who had heard of folate, only 55% knew that folate's effect on birth defects was to reduce risk of their occurrence.
- 59% of respondents knew that vitamin supplements are a source of folate. 49% of respondents knew that food is a potential source of folate.
- Only 46% of respondents were currently taking a multivitamin. In comparison, the 1997 March of Dimes survey reported that 55% of women nationally were currently taking a multivitamin.

## WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FOLATE AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR PREVENTION OF BIRTH DEFECTS; CALIFORNIA, 1997

**Genetic Disease Branch**  
**Maternal and Child Health Branch**

### Public Health Message:

*These findings indicate that California women have limited knowledge about folate and its importance for the prevention of birth defects. This suggests there is a need for educating California women, particularly Latinas and 18–29 year-olds, about folate and its role in the prevention of neural tube defects.*



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